

MBTA Communities Working Group

July 25, 2023

Meeting Summary

Attending: Rebecca Gruber, Shaina Korman-Houston, Kin Lau, Sanjay Newton, Stephen Revilak, Laura Wiener

Staff: Jillian Harvey, Marisa Lau, David Morgan, Teresa Marzilli, Claire Ricker

Guests: Matthew Littell (Utile)

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Newton welcomes the attendees in the town hall auditorium and introduces Ms. Ricker.

Ms. Ricker welcomes attendees to the fourth public forum on multi-family zoning for MBTA Communities. To get a sense of who's in the room, Ms. Ricker asks attendees to raise their hand if they live in Arlington Heights, then Arlington Center, then East Arlington. There appears to be a mix of attendees from the three regions of town.

Ms. Ricker provides background information on the housing shortage we have in Massachusetts. 50 years ago, we were building approximately 50,000 homes/year throughout the state. In the last 50 years, that number has shrunk considerably, while the state's population has increased. She says we won't be able to close the wealth gap or address issues like climate change until we provide housing that's plentiful and affordable.

Ms. Ricker reviews the timeline going forward. We plan to send a draft map to the state in August for a pre-adoption review. This will give state officials the opportunity to evaluate our plan for compliance before it goes to town meeting. The ARB will hold public hearings in September, and the proposal should go to town meeting sometime in October (date still to be determined). Once town meeting has approved the zoning changes, they'll go to the Attorney General's office for review in November. Ms. Ricker believes that having pre-approval will facilitate faster review by the Attorney General.

Refresher on MBTA Communities Legislation

Mr. Newton explains why Section 3A matters. Passing Section 3A-compliant zoning this fall will allow us to participate in the state's pilot fossil fuel ban, we'll improve access to public transit, and we'll be able to move the ball forward on numerous town goals. Mr. Newton notes that non-compliance is not an option, as the Attorney General has said that non-compliance is subject to investigation as a violation of fair housing and anti-discrimination laws. He says this is a chance for Arlington to express its values via zoning.

Mr. Littell says that Arlington hired his firm, Utile, to help draft Section 3A-compliant zoning, via a grant from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership. Arlington is considered an "adjacent" community

because we don't have subway or rail stations, but we are next to communities that do. The law requires us to provide a zoning district of reasonable size where multi-family housing (three or more dwellings) is allowed by-right, without age restrictions, suitable for families with children, and at an average gross density of 15 dwellings/acre. For Arlington, "reasonable size" means a minimum of 32 acres.

Mr. Littell explains that there's also a unit ("capacity") requirement, which is 10% of the number of existing homes, or 15 times the number of acres required for the district, whichever is larger. Arlington's capacity requirement is 2046 units.

The multi-family zone can be composed of sub-districts, provided that one of the sub-districts provides 50% or more of the required capacity, and that each sub-district is a minimum of 5 acres.

Communities can allow commercial uses in the multi-family district, but they cannot require them. Communities cannot require special permits for multi-family housing in these districts; site plan review is okay, provided it's not used in a way that would obstruct permitting.

The state has provided a mathematical model, to help communities determine the capacity of their districts. The model accepts several input variables, references a set of GIS maps, and uses this information to compute capacity. Mr. Littell says the model isn't a perfect predictor of theoretical density, but it is needed to determine compliance.

Arlington has a lower capacity requirement because it's an adjacent community. Capacity is what would theoretically be allowed if all the parcels in the district were vacant. Capacity is not a plan to build; rather, it only indicates what's allowed.

For "reasonable size," Mr. Littell says the state starts with a minimum of 50 acres; Arlington's minimum is 32 acres, because the town is geographically small. This gives communities some flexibility in creating their district: they can go with a smaller area and higher density, or a larger area with lower density.

Mr. Littell shows a series of slides to illustrate different levels of density. Examples from Arlington include Downing Square (45 dwellings/acre), 438 Mass Ave (49 dwellings/acre), and 389 Mass Ave (117 dwellings/acre).

Mr. Littell shows slides from MHP's Residency tool, showing average density in different areas of Arlington. Arlington Heights has an average density of 10.34 dwellings/acre, Arlington Center has 11.5 dwellings/acre, and Capitol Square is 14.3 dwellings/acre, close to what Section 3A requires. Arlington has a number of existing multi-family parcels that are in the range of 50-100 dwellings/acre.

Arlington isn't required to locate its district near a train station, so the map has evolved to include the Mass Ave and Broadway corridors, in the spirit of transit-oriented development.

Mr. Littell tells the audience that compliance with Section 3A isn't just a good idea – it's the law. Compliance will ensure that Arlington remains eligible for state funding grants. Communities also have obligations under anti-discrimination and fair housing laws. The state grants us the power to create zoning, and this is why the state can ask us to change it.

Engagement Update

Mx. Marzilli has been assisting the MBTA Communities working group with public engagement. Tonight is our fourth community meeting; earlier ones took place on Nov 17th, March 9th, and June 8th. There were two surveys conducted: one during March and April, and one during June and July. Engagement activities done to date include:

- Tabling at the Health and Human Services Resources and Connections Fair,
- Tabling at the Arlington Farmers Market,
- Having a display table in the Robbins Library, and holding “office hours” at the library,
- Holding pop-up events at the Council on Aging and Arlington EATS,
- Collaborating with the Housing Corporation of Arlington,
- Giving presentation at Calvary Church,
- Speaking with numerous groups, including: the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, Arlington Public Schools staff, the Assessor’s Office, members of the Interfaith Community, the Department of Public Works, the Arlington Police Department, the Open Space Committee, Green Streets Arlington, and numerous other residents.

We’re planning to continue engagement activities throughout the summer and fall, and we hope to hear from a multitude of voices. Upcoming engagement activities will include: continued appearances at the Farmers Market, additional Library Office Hours, a focus group with the Arlington Chamber of Commerce, outreach efforts in conjunction with Arlington EATS and the Housing Corporation of Arlington, and meeting residents at events such as the Res Concert Series and Town Day.

Mr. Revilak would like to speak about two recent engagement activities: the public meeting on June 8th, and the survey that was held in June and July.

The June 8th public session was held in the Arlington Community Center. This was a time for the working group to check in with the public and show what they’d done so far, but also bring people together, get them seated around tables, and have conversations. Approximately 120 people attended. Attendees expressed support for expanding the multi-family district, and for having housing with a variety of types, sizes, and price points.

In order to hear from people who weren’t able to attend the June 8th event in person, we held a second survey during June and July. The survey questions were similar to those asked during the public forum; respondents were asked to provide feedback about the size and scale of buildings, and how the multi-family districts should relate to our current commercial districts. 213 people responded to the survey, leaving 550 comments. Survey responses showed support for multi-family housing along the corridors, 6-unit and larger apartments (to provide affordable housing), and transit-oriented development. There was disagreement regarding whether to place the multi-family districts in areas that are currently zoned for business or industrial uses; one group felt they should go in the commercial districts and one felt they should go outside. Mr. Revilak expects a robust conversation on this topic during the coming months.

The key takeaways from the size and scale question were: locating multi-family housing along corridors like Mass Ave and Broadway, 6 units or more, and having taller buildings on corridors, which stepped down into neighborhoods. The key takeaways regarding the relationship to commercial districts were: adding housing near commercial centers and support for mixed-use.

Presentation of Updated Draft Map

Ms. Ricker shows the current version of the draft district map, which is in its eighth iteration. The map has two districts: Mass ave and Broadway, and the neighborhood multi-family district. Both allow 4 stories by right, where “by-right” means that there’s a streamlined permitting process, without a discretionary review.

Ms. Ricker says there will be an opportunity to have a two-story height bonus for ground-floor commercial, or one story for providing additional affordable housing. The district is located on transit routes to reduce car dependency, and it’s located out of commercial, open space, and historic districts. She believes this plan will increase the overall amount of taxable commercial space and encourage the formation of fifteen-minute neighborhoods. It spreads the housing capacity out, rather than putting it all in one neighborhood.

This map will allow 4-6 stories in the Mass Ave/Broadway district, stepping down to four stories in the neighborhood multi-family district, and stepping down again to 2.5 stories in existing residential districts. Ms. Ricker tells the audience that Arlington will ask the state to allow us to use our existing 15% inclusionary housing requirement.

Ms. Gruber would like to answer some of the common questions the working group has received. Can the existing sewers handle a larger population? Yes, Arlington had a much larger population in the past. Can the schools handle more students? Yes, school enrollment is starting to peak, and school district officials believe it will decline afterwards. They’ve also advised us to spread the district out, to give them more flexibility to adjust to changes in elementary school enrollment.

What about traffic and parking? We’ve located the districts near businesses so residents have the opportunity to make trips without driving, and the working group voted to endorse a maximum of one parking space per dwelling.

What percentage will be affordable? We intend to ask the state for permission to use our existing inclusionary zoning, which is 15% of units priced for households at 60% AMI.

What about trees and private green space? The working group supports these things and is working with the Department of Planning and Community Development in order to figure out how to do them.

What about businesses and the tax base? This map retains all our commercially zoned parcels, and we believe that added density will be a benefit to existing businesses.

Finally, what does capacity mean? Ms. Gruber says capacity is calculated with a mathematical model – it’s a potential, theoretical maximum. It doesn’t indicate what would actually be built.

Questions and Comments

Mr. Newton explains the process for the public comment section of the meeting. Attendees who wish to speak will write their names on slips of paper, which will be placed in a box and drawn at random. In order to get through everyone, speakers will be limited to two minutes each.

There's a panel in front of the room to answer questions. These are: Jillian Harvey (DEI Department), Matthew Littell (Utile), Teresa Marzilli (DEI Department), David Morgan (Planning Department), Mr. Revilak (ARB), and Ms. Ricker (Planning Director). Sanjay Newton will moderate.

Francis Tony: Mr. Tony says the outside consultant mentioned a formula; he asks what the number was.

Panel: According to the state's model, the districts contain 176 acres, with an estimated capacity of 12-15,000 dwellings. Mr. Littell says he's recently discovered some problems with the model's capacity regulations, and he's working with the state to resolve them.

Francis Tony: Mr. Tony says this seems like overkill.

Rebecca Peterson: Ms. Peterson doesn't suggest we don't comply, but she doesn't want to see us over-comply. She thinks there are too many possible downsides. She thinks this change won't make Arlington a pleasant place to live.

Lee Gregoras: Ms. Gregoras is concerned that people's property will be taken away. She proposes upscaling the housing projects along Broadway. She's like to see more landscaping.

Panel: The Arlington Housing Authority owns the public housing near Broadway, and they already have tools to redevelop it, if they wanted to do so. Ms. Ricker says the issue is funding.

Elisabeth Carr-Jones: Ms. Carr Jones says she's speaking on behalf of a group called Green Streets Arlington. She says this plan is justifiable until you realize that it will create so much density. She says the density is too high, and the setbacks are too small. She'd hate to see effort wasted by not doing something that works for Arlington.

Matthew Owens: Mr. Owens has a question about the economic feasibility study that would be needed in or for Arlington to retain its current 15% inclusionary zoning. He asks what work has gone into this, and how the state might react.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says that the MBTA Communities guidance allows 10%, and higher percentages have to be approved by the state. The state will consider our 15% but we'll need to hire someone to do a feasibility study to demonstrate this. Ms. Ricker notes that developers have done 40B projects in Arlington, which have a 25% affordability requirement.

Matthew Owens: Mr. Owens supports the current scenario. He thinks it's consistent with the existing scale of Mass Ave.

Josephine Babiarz: Ms. Babiarz asks what will happen if nothing gets built. She's concerned about Arlington not having any land, and the way the stretch code might increase construction costs. She asks "what if we comply, but don't attract developers?"

Panel: Ms. Ricker says she doesn't know if anything will be built, but we'll write the zoning and put in some incentives. Arlington continues to be subject to 40B, and we have less control over that process. Ms. Ricker says we should decide what we want to see and figure out how to get that built.

Arthur Prokosch: Mr. Prokosch supports the level of density in this plan. He values inclusivity, sustainability, and prudence. He believes this zoning will generate affordable housing and says we won't be able to build enough of it without developer support. Mr. Prokosch says that resource use and sustainability are correlated with density, and more density will increase the tax levy.

David Ossofsky: M. Ossofsky didn't realize there was a plan to increase density beyond what the law required, but he thinks that's a small concern. His concern is that the value of his condo will decrease if additional housing is built.

Panel: Mr. Littell says we haven't done a financial impact analysis on the value of existing properties, but more development generally translates into more value all around. However, one can't assume that without a study.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says that brand new buildings will look newer and different, and this will incentivize existing owners to maintain their properties.

Juli Brazile: Ms. Brazile likes the idea of bonuses and isn't particularly concerned with the capacity estimate. She asks how we arrived at the current map.

Panel: Mr. Littell says there was broad consensus for spreading the district out, rather than concentrating it in one place. The goal was to have a district that made sense. (The minimum district size of) 32 acres is small, and if we took that route, there'd be a question of who gets it. The map came out of a growing consensus about a district that made sense.

Mary Ellen Aronow: Ms. Aronow is part of Green Streets Arlington. She thinks the multi-family district needs a 15-foot setback. It's encouraging to her that the ARB is considering expanding the zoning bylaw's site development standards. She says the district also needs screening and buffer areas.

Neil Burnam: Mr. Burnam asks if the working group has considered the consistency of style.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says that all projects will be subject to residential design guidelines and site plan review.

Neil Burnam: Mr. Burnam asks if buildings will be able to go up to four stories by right.

Panel: A member of the panel answers in the affirmative.

Andrew Fischer: Mr. Fischer says the only way to close the wealth gap is through home ownership. He supports two-story buildings for affordable housing. He says we can have the plan as it is, but it has to stop after 2046 units.

Carl Wagner: Mr. Wagner acknowledges that the Attorney General says we have to comply. He thinks we should comply, but no more. He claims that the last map provided more than 20,000 units, and there was no talk from the ARB. Mr. Wagner says it's ridiculous to inconvenience residents, and it bothers him that so few people are involved and that so few are here tonight. He says the purpose should be to put density by transit.

Phil Goff: Mr. Goff says this will have some impact, but four stories doesn't scare him, and he thinks most of the existing two-family homes aren't going anywhere. He'd rather see four-unit apartments than two-unit McMansions. He supports the strategy outlined here but would like to see some density near Alewife.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says that when someone sells their home, there's an opportunity to welcome new people into town.

Shelly Dein: Ms. Dein lives in the orange section (note: this is the neighborhood multi-family district), and she's very supportive of the plan. She's not scared of the height and says that four stories isn't crazy. Most of the homes in her neighborhood are three stories. She's pleased to see the sustainability that comes with density. Ms. Dein asks why some areas of town are excluded, like Arlington Heights.

Panel: Mr. Revilak says the heights were left out because the Arlington Redevelopment Board is working on an updated zoning proposal for the area.

Annie LaCourt: Ms. LaCourt asks how big 176 acres is, as a percentage of Arlington's land.

Panel: Mr. Revilak says it's around 5%.

Annie LaCourt: Ms. LaCourt says the multi-family housing isn't going in any of our commercial districts, and we're not using up any public open space. She's fully in support. Ms. LaCourt says we have a climate and a housing crisis, and density is the solution to both. If the housing isn't built here, it will be built further out, leading to more driving and more emissions. She urges Arlington to do what's right, rather than doing the minimum.

Michelle Phelan: Ms. Phelan says there was an earlier version of the plan where the blue (Arlington/Broadway) district was five stories, and the orange (neighborhood multi-family) was three. Ms. Phelan felt more comfortable with that. Under this plan, there could be six story buildings on both sides of Mass Ave. She asks the working group to think about setbacks and the tree canopy. She says that urbanization and density are good, but we need open space.

Jennifer Susse: Ms. Susse is very excited about this plan, because it means legalizing buildings like ones we used to build – until we made it illegal to build them in 1975. She notes that town meeting was concerned about people building thousands of ADUs when we passed our ADU bylaw, but there have only been 4-5 built so far. She likes the reduction in setbacks and asks the working group to consider reducing setbacks for ground floor commercial.

Panel: Ms. Ricker notes that front-yard setbacks are smaller for residential-only buildings, but 0' if there's ground floor commercial.

Bill Fuchs: Mr. Fuchs would support a transfer into the commercial districts, if there was a requirement for ground-floor commercial. He asks why the multi-family housing isn't included in the area under consideration for the Arlington Heights Business District.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says the Redevelopment Board asked to have that area excluded.

Bill Fuchs: Mr. Fuchs thinks it's a good program, and there's no risk to public open space. He thinks it's a right-sized plan.

Gina Gregorias: Ms. Gregorias supports compliance, but thinks this plan is overkill. She asks "is the goal to rid the town of single family homes?", and "what protection do homeowners have from predatory developers?".

Panel: Mr. Revilak says there's no plan to rid the town of single-family homes. A person who wants to build a single-family home on any of these parcels will still be able to do so.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says there will be several levels of review, and opportunities for public comment.

Panel: Mr. Morgan (following up on an earlier question about setbacks) says there was consideration of 20' setbacks before. Someone building a home can choose between a fixed setback and the average of what already exists, and the setbacks of existing buildings are closer to 10' than to 20'.

Austin Brown: Mr. Brown says Massachusetts has a problem with shoddy homes. There were town homes build in his neighborhood on Belknap Street. A year after purchase, the new owners found problems with them. He says these defects weren't caught in the process. Mr. Brown says developers are predatory, and he thinks they need more oversight.

Jean ?: As an engineer, Jean doesn't agree with putting housing on corridors. She says the 77 bus isn't reliable and doesn't come every twelve minutes as scheduled. She says the better bus project will reduce the level of service from the 350. The Turkey Hill bus (number 67) might be able to substitute, but it has less frequent service than the 350. She's offended by how poor bus service is in Arlington, and questions the assumptions about concentrating development on Mass Ave.

Wynelle Evans: Ms. Evans believes that change will happen very fast after this zoning is adopted. The financial incentives are so great that we'll see an explosion of development. She says we're talking about turning Arlington into a city. Ms. Evans has a question about capacity modeling. She'd like to see the model sheets produced, and the input data made available.

Mark Rosenthal: Mr. Rosenthal says that Utile's estimate of capacity was 14-15,000 units, but only 2000 are required by the state. He'd like Utile to do a study on the projected number of residents. He'd like to know how many additional residents this housing will create, along with the potential number of additional students.

JP Lewicke: Mr. Lewicke wants to address the question of "why extra capacity?". If we don't allow more housing to be built on existing sites here, it will just be developed further out, perhaps using thousands of acres of new land, leading to a lot more driving. He thinks that the children of residents should be able to find places to live in town, and we need to focus on addressing the climate crisis.

Carol Band: Ms. Band is worried that we'll get more development like the building next to Stop and Shop, which she thinks is ugly. She says the maximum of one parking space per unit is an admirable idea but believes that people will park on the street.

Panel: Ms. Ricker points out that the building next to Stop and Shop was reviewed by the Arlington Redevelopment Board, through a series of public hearings.

Stephen Mallon: Mr. Mallon doesn't support the proposal. He thinks it wasn't communicated effectively to all residents and is a disservice to the town. Mr. Mallon has lived here since 1975 and believes we need to survey the whole town.

Marian King: Ms. King says the bus service on Broadway doesn't run into Arlington on Sundays, which is problematic. It's getting more difficult to get to the red line. Ms. King agrees with allowing more housing, but there's no requirement to improve MBTA service. There's also no requirement for EV charging stations or solar panels.

Jordan Weinstein: Mr. Weinstein asks how the capacity would change if the neighborhood multi-family district was limited to three stories.

Panel: Mr. Littell says that would reduce capacity by around 3000 dwellings.

Jordan Weinstein: Mr. Weinstein asks how the capacity would change if the Mass Ave/Broadway district was limited to four stories.

Panel: Mr. Littell says that wouldn't change the capacity, as four stories is the by-right height.

Jordan Weinstein: Mr. Weinstein says this is a massive overreach, and he doesn't see anyone on the working group who has any sense of moderation. He repeats that it's an overreach, and says he'll vote against it.

James Fleming: Mr. Fleming has a question about the model assumptions. He thinks the modeled capacity for the neighborhood multi-family district is implausibly high.

Panel: Mr. Littell says the model assumes 1000 square feet/dwelling, so the capacity is floor area divided by 1000.

James Fleming: Mr. Fleming ask why the consultants chose a distance of 350' around the corridors.

Panel: Mr. Littell says they tried to come up with a value that looked rational when applied.

James Fleming: Mr. Fleming likes the orange (neighborhood multi-family) district. He doesn't understand why more people aren't clamoring to be in that district.

Topher Heigham: Mr. Heigham notes that 5' side yard setbacks are proposed for the Mass Ave/Broadway district. He asks if anyone has talked to the fire department about his.

Panel: Mr. Littell says 5' setbacks are absolutely achievable with the fire code.

Topher Heigham: Mr. Heigham asks if we're planning to submit the whole plan to the state, or just part.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says we're planning to submit the whole plan.

Colin Mitchum: Mr. Mitchum has two points. First, he found out about this meeting because of a flyer that an opposition group left at his door. He believes there needs to be more outreach. Second, he asks

what the acreage is, and believes this should have been put in the plan. Mr. Mitchum believes communication needs to be improved. He asks what recourse a property owner will have if someone tries to build a four-story building next door to them.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says that members of the public could object at public meetings but stopping it would require litigation.

William Logan: Mr. Logan has concerns about capacity. He asks if we could plan for 25 years out instead of 50. He'd prefer three stories to four and thinks three stories might allow the town to grow in a healthier way. He sees the potential for many accidents and asks if we can bite off a little less.

Alex Bagnall: Mr. Bagnall says that Arlington needs to actually welcome people, if we want to be considered a welcoming community. He walked to this meeting and passed several 6-8 story apartment buildings on the way. He asks if this zoning proposal would allow those existing buildings to be built.

Panel: Mr. Revilak answers "no."

Wendy Richter: Ms. Richter says the biggest blue (Mass Ave/Broadway) districts are along Mill Brook, which is a flood plain. She's concerned about the width of Mass Ave and would like that taken into account. She believes that six-story buildings will create a canyon. She asks if we can incentivize the use of larger parcels.

Emily Snyder: Ms. Snyder asks how other towns are handling this.

Panel: Mr. Littell says that Utile is working with several communities on Section 3A compliance. He says that they all want to preserve commercial space, and that districts generally evolve from minimum compliance to something that makes more sense. He says the process in other towns is similar to what's being done here.

Chuck Carney: Mr. Carney has a question about affordable housing. He says the state allows 10% without review, but will allow up to 20% with review. He asks if the working group has considered a 20% affordability requirement.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says we can't impose a higher requirement in the MBTA districts than we require in the rest of town.

Chuck Carney: Mr. Carney asks if the working group would consider 20%.

Panel: Mr. Revilak says that communities are not allowed to put requirements on MBTA districts that are more stringent than what's required elsewhere. He says we're going to ask for a 15% affordability requirement in the MBTA districts, because 15% is the requirement everywhere else in town.

Andy Greenspon: Mr. Greenspon is very enthusiastic about the proposal. He prefers walkability and public transit, and he drives as little as possible. He'd like to see more housing for car-lite households. Mr. Greenspon says he can barely afford to rent here, and that we need missing middle housing, like six-plexes and triple-deckers. He asks if homeowners will be required to do anything if this passes.

Panel: One of the panelists answers in the negative.

Allison Briggs: Ms. Briggs supports the proposal, and she's not afraid of high density. She prefers to get around by bus and bicycle and wouldn't be able to live in Arlington if it weren't for this kind of housing. She's living the dream life here. Ms. Briggs believes the working group took all aspects into consideration, and that the proposal is climate-forward.

Gina Rodriguez: Ms. Rodriguez says we should do anything we can to help the environment. She asks the working group to consider charging stations and more reliable public transit. She's unclear about what the Arlington Heights rezoning study is and asks for more information about that.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says the ARB has approximately ten zoning articles related to Arlington's business districts. One of these would consolidate the patchwork of business districts in Arlington Heights and make them more consistent.

Aram Hollman: Mr. Hollman says the working group isn't doing a very good job, because they've been asked to do something that's not in Arlington's best interests. He says the law requires capacity, but what we actually need is housing. He thinks we should limit the capacity to 2046. Mr. Hollman believes the working group hasn't responded to other proposals, and we should stop referring to these requirements as the MBTA law. He says the housing is going into the most dense parts of town.

Susan Stamps: Ms. Stamps thinks there are gaps in the plan. It's environmentally friendly because it's dense, but it doesn't require enough setbacks. Ms. Stamps says we're in the middle of climate change. She's a member of Green Streets Arlington, which has had conversations with the working group. They're asking for 15' front setbacks, in order to have enough room to plant trees.

Nicole Gustas: Ms. Gustas says she moved to Arlington because Arlington doesn't do the bare minimum, and she's excited to see a bold plan that goes beyond what's required. She says that most of these areas have three-story buildings, and four stories isn't a big change. Before the meeting, Ms. Gustas heard talk that made her think this would be like Boston's West End redevelopment, and she's glad to see that's not what's being planned.

Ann LeRoyer: Ms. LeRoyer supports the green streets effort, and she'd like to have more public open space. She asks how the new zoning in the heights will mesh with the multi-family zoning for MBTA communities.

Panel: Ms. Ricker says the two aren't counter to each other. The plan for the heights will focus more on mixed use and creating a single business district for more flexibility.

Mark Kaepplein: Mr. Kaepplein suggests doing outreach to social clubs, rather than progressive enclaves. His district is mostly renters, and he believes this is a rich man/poor man's plan which puts the burden on the lowest income areas. He says the plan doesn't treat the bike path as a transit corridor, and he asks the working group to consider it as a transportation option. Mr. Kaepplein asks if anyone has done an area median income analysis of the proposed area.

Panel: One of the panelists answers in the negative.

Charles Blandy: Mr. Blandy asks “does more market rate housing affect affordability?”, and says the answer is “yes.” He suggests people read the “Supply Skepticism” paper from the Furman Center. He says this is a regional mandate, and that more market rate housing will help alleviate rents nearby.

Len Cardon: Mr. Cardon is very supportive of more housing but thinks it should be done on Mass Ave and Broadway. He asks what we’re trying to do with the neighborhood multi-family district. He thinks it will incentivize tear-downs and luxury condos, and that this will happen sporadically. Mr. Cardon would like to see drawings of four-story buildings. He suggests sticking with three stories, because no one will build a six-plex if 6-8 stories are allowed.

Gordon Jamieson: Mr. Jamieson believes we need better service from the MBTA. He notes that our zoning already allows 0’ setbacks in business districts, and town meeting has passed zoning changes to allow more density. If Arlington were to do the minimum, the question is where it would go. He suggests the working group produce a map showing what heights are currently allowed in the different districts, and to calculate the existing capacity of the multi-family zones.

Gary Goldsmith: Mr. Goldsmith says the town is greener and a wonderful place to live. He says we’re planning for what it will look like 38 years from now, and he applauds the long-term thinking approach. Mr. Goldsmith says this project is like an elephant: what it looks like depends on where you touch it. He says the challenge of creating setbacks is significant, and notes that the capacity model assumes that dwellings are only 1000 square feet.

Elizabeth Pyle: Ms. Pyle would like to see alternative maps, showing different levels of density. She says there should be a range of maps, and that disagreements about density can be resolved by putting forward multiple maps. Ms. Pyle says there are only 20,000 units in town and asks what an addition of 75% will look like in terms of the town’s ability to provide services. She says that impacts need to be addressed.

Beth Melofchik: Ms. Melofchik says the plans are predicated on public transit, which isn’t adequate. She says she won’t vote for anything beyond minimum compliance. She says we’re in a climate breakdown and tells the working group to go back to the drawing board. She’d like to see 15’ setbacks and shade trees.

Kristin Anderson: Ms. Anderson has a business in the heights, and she says the plan protects current businesses, which provide services. She thinks we need 15-20’ setbacks for trees. She says that Save the Alewife Brook is interested in the water quality of Alewife Brook and that trees will help absorb stormwater. She’s also concerned about flooding.

Charlie Foskett: Mr. Foskett thinks the capacity issue is serious, and we need a detailed financial analysis of what it will cost taxpayers. He thinks that taxpayers can’t afford the plan, and we need to know what it will cost.

Carol Kowalski: Ms. Kowalski would like to speak to the issue of putting the multi-family district in areas zoned for business vs areas zoned residential. She says there are lots of sites crying out to be redeveloped. 28 Mass Ave is one example; the town deserves a beautiful gateway. 30 Mystic

Street is another, along with the Greater Boston Motor Sports block. She says that new multi-family housing will generate more tax revenue than depreciated 50-year-old commercial buildings.

Radnakar Valenti: Mr. Valenti loves this plan. He says that high density saves green space and is more financially sustainable. He notes that the Section 3A guidelines say that the housing should be near pedestrian amenities, transit, and cycling. However, there's not a requirement for more bike lanes on Mass Ave. He'd like to see separated bike lanes on Broadway and Mass Ave.

Panel: Mr. Littell clarifies that capacity is based on what could be built on an empty lot. It's not an increase over what's already there.

Brian McBride: Mr. McBride thinks we shouldn't submit a plan with 10' front setbacks. He says that's not enough for green space or trees. He asks the working group to consider what things will be like in 25 years with global warming. Mr. McBride says that setbacks are really important – it's a tradeoff between increased density and a pleasant environment. He thinks we should try to make this a win-win situation.

Steve Makowka: Mr. Makowka says the map still covers part of a historic district on Broadway. He says that other communities have put representatives of cultural and historic groups on their working groups. Mr. Makowka has a question about Arlington's participation in the gas ban pilot. He asks if there are other communities to take our place, if Arlington doesn't participate.

Panel: Mr. Morgan answers in the affirmative; several communities have submitted home rule petitions to the state.

Steve Makowka: Mr. Makowka thinks we should let Somerville take our place in the pilot, so the gas ban can get the biggest bang for the buck.

Panel: Mr. Morgan wants to mention what Bill McKibben wrote about Lexington. He said it was very valuable for them to adopt MBTA zoning, but we need to look beyond zoning for other things we need. The MBTA Communities requirements are about zoning, but we can work towards other goals in other venues, like broadening site development standards. He says there are ways to accomplish what we want, within and outside of zoning.

Chris Loreti: Mr. Loreti thinks the maps should have names, and this one should be called the "shit on East Arlington map." He says it will allow 60' buildings that don't fit in with the neighborhood. He says people want this to spread out, but the committee is more interested in listening to themselves. He tells the working group to expect a substitute motion at town meeting and says this won't create affordable housing.

Marissa Stoker: Ms. Stoker has concerns about the plan, and says it needs safeguards. She thinks the transit experience needs to be better and is concerned that this will lead to a big bang change. She asks what we'll gain, other than affordable housing. Ms. Stoker asks "who's most harmed?". She thinks town employees will be the most harmed because they'll be burdened by more people.

Dorothy Gosline: Ms. Gosline asks "who's most harmed." She used to live in Seattle and says that her old neighborhood changed when the city changed its zoning. She asks what the other options are. Ms. Gosline says that boomers will give up their houses, and younger families will move in.

Elaine Crowder: Ms. Crowder says we've heard about the difficulties of using public transit, treeless canyons, and heat islands. She says she knows what 110-degree pavement feels like, and asks if the bike path was considered.

Panel: Mr. Littell says the bike path wasn't considered, but there wasn't an intentional decision to exclude it.

Elaine Crowder: Ms. Crowder suggests putting some of the district along the bike path.

Linda Hanson: Ms. Hanson sees the MBTA Communities requirements as an opportunity to increase the amount and types of housing we have. She asks about the difference between the blue (Mass Ave/Broadway) and orange (neighborhood multi-family) districts.

Panel: Mr. Ricker says that both allow four stories by right. It's possible to go up to six stories on Mass Ave and five stories on Broadway via bonuses. There aren't any height bonuses for the orange district.

Julia Kew: Ms. Kew asks the working group not to exclude business and industrial parcels, since these are the largest parcels in town and more attractive to developers. She says that a big piece of land in a smart growth area is very desirable. Ms. Kew believes the working group might not get what it wants by leaving large parcels out.

John Worden: Mr. Worden says that Arlington is the twelfth-densest community in the state, and we've already done our share. He says that all the denser communities are cities, with the exception of Brookline. Mr. Worden says Arlington has low commercial tax revenue, and that each new resident costs twice as much in services as the tax revenue they generate. He urges the working group to propose a plan that minimally complies with the law.

Amy Slutzky: Ms. Slutzky is glad to live in a progressive town that cares about sustainability. She lives in a 130-unit condo complex and would love it if we could re-open the survey and put a copy of the map on a gigantic banner and hang it across Mass Ave. Ms. Slutzky is a member of Mothers out Front, and she likes the idea of having a 15' setback for trees and protected roofs for solar panels.

Alan Carr-Jones: Mr. Carr-Jones wants to propose several things for the working group's consideration: bigger front setbacks (like 25'), having easements for public access, landscaping with natives, green parking lots, reducing the size of parking lots, and requiring more green space on larger projects. Mr. Carr-Jones says these suggestions are about managing stormwater.

With no more names left to draw from the box, Mr. Newton wishes the audience good evening and the meeting is adjourned.